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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KWBG KPAL IS

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER ASKS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO
JUDGE NEW GOVERNMENT BASED ON ITS PLATFORM

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles. Reasons: 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Nasser Al Qidwa asserted in a February 15 briefing of foreign diplomats that the election results do not give Hamas a popular mandate to change the legal, social, or political basis of the Palestinian system. He declared the election results prove Palestinian society is almost completely polarized between Fatah and Hamas and underscored that the only way Fatah will join in a coalition with Hamas is if the incoming government adopts a new political platform in line with President Abbas, the PLO and the national consensus. Al Qidwa downplayed the possibility of a technocratic government, and also called the scenario of Hamas isolation leading to government collapse and the calling of new elections "very unrealistic." Al Qidwa urged the international community to judge the new government by its stated political program, not by the well-known political program of Hamas. End summary.

"Hamas does not have
a clear popular mandate..."

¶2. (C) In a briefing to a group of approximately fifty Consuls General and Government Representatives February 15 in Ramallah, PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al Qidwa summarized the January 25 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) election results. Al Qidwa commented that Hamas had gained a clear majority of the seats in the Council, but a look at the popular vote put Hamas and Fatah on much closer footing. On that basis, he declared, Hamas has an absolute right to form a government, but does not have a clear popular mandate to change the legal, social, or political basis of the Palestinian system. Palestinian society is almost completely polarized between Fatah and Hamas.

"Technocratic system will not work,
Hamas must change to form coalition."

¶3. (C) Al Qidwa called it "unwise" for anyone, including his own party, Fatah, to refuse or accept to participate in a Hamas-led government based on principle and without first understanding the political platform of that government. Al Qidwa emphasized that Hamas cannot run a functioning government and lead the Palestinians based on their existing

political program. They must create a different program, in line with the President, the PLO and the national consensus, he stated. On the basis of that program, Fatah will decide whether or not to participate in a coalition with Hamas. Al Qidwa stressed that "Hamas and Hamas only" will be responsible if the parties are unable to form a coalition. The option of forming a technocratic government, in his opinion, has never been a serious alternative. He argued that amidst such complex and possibly dangerous circumstances, there must be a driving political force behind the government that takes responsibility for leading.

"Don't judge government based on Hamas platform,
judge government based on government platform."

¶14. (C) Al Qidwa also counseled that it is unrealistic to think that isolation of Hamas will quickly lead to a total collapse of the government and the calling of new elections. Hamas will be in the government, he said, and there will be no quick fix: "We are dealing with an international organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and it will take time before any drastic changes occur." Al Qidwa urged the international community to press Hamas in the right direction and encourage transformation, and not to judge the new government based on the stated political program of Hamas, the organization, but instead on the basis of the stated political program of the new government.

"Transitional Government Will
Not Dissolve on February 18."

¶15. (C) In closing, the Foreign Minister appealed to the international community not to cut off assistance to the Palestinian people, saying it would only lead to further deterioration. He also questioned recent Israeli comments reported in the press that the GOI would consider the inauguration of the incoming PLC, scheduled for February 18, as the turning point from the current caretaker government that the Quartet has pledged to continue to support. Al Qidwa stressed that February 18 will not be the turning point, noting that up to five weeks could be needed to form the new government.

WALLES